RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

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Urban Aboriginal Households: A Profile of Demographic, Housing and Economic Conditions in Canada's Prairie and Territories Region

INTRODUCTION

This study of urban Aboriginal households was undertaken to provide an overview of their housing and socio-economic situation in 19 communities in the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, the Yukon and Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Using the most current Statistics Canada census data and additional data from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the following variables were studied: population; age; mobility; education; unemployment; household income; homelessness; household type; homeownership; and core housing need.

The findings from the study establish baseline information for agencies involved in Aboriginal or affordable housing issues and for community discussions.

VARIABLES STUDIED

Population

Aboriginal[1] populations in Canadian cities have grown dramatically over the 1981-2001 period and in the cities covered by the study have more than doubled. The Aboriginal population under study makes up 6.0 per cent of the urban population, while the urban Aboriginal population in all of Canada accounts for up just 2.1 per cent of the total population. Statistics Canada estimates that the 22 per cent growth in the urban Aboriginal population is made up of 10 per cent natural increase and 12 per cent due to a change in how respondents identified themselves on the Aboriginal identity question in the two censuses.

Age

Considering all 19 urban centers, 44.3 per cent of the Aboriginal population is under 20 years old, compared with 26.3 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population. In the 20 to 44+ age group, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations are very similar as they both account for about 40 per cent of their respective populations. In the 44+ age group, however, only 16.1 per cent of the Aboriginal population falls into this category, while 34.8 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population is within the same age bracket.

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[1] Included in the Aboriginal population are those persons who reported (in the 2001 census) identifying with at least one Aboriginal group, that is, "North American Indian", "Metis", or "Inuit (Eskimo)", and/or who reported being a Treaty Indian or a Registered Indian, as defined by the *Indian Act of Canada*, and/or reported they were members of an Indian Band or First Nation.

Data for this study were taken from Statistics Canada, Census 2001 Aboriginal Population Profiles; Topic-based Tabulations: Household Type; Statistics Canada (June 2005), Aboriginal Conditions in Census Metropolitan Areas, 1981-2001; and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation: Census-based housing indicators and data.

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HOME TO CANADIANS

Mobility

People may move for better opportunities or they may be forced to move due to evictions or the loss of employment. Whatever the reason, it generally suggests less likelihood of homeownership and an increase in demand for rental accommodation.

Although mobility varies across the 19 centres, with minor exceptions, the Aboriginal population has a consistently higher rate of mobility than the non-Aboriginal population. The Aboriginal population is nearly twice as likely to be mobile than the non-Aboriginal population. According to the 2001 census, all Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs)[1] in the Prairie provinces saw about 35 to 50 per cent of their Aboriginal populations changing residences within the community in the previous five years.

Education

Generally speaking, a higher level of education results in greater earning potential. From a housing perspective, this means improved access to homeownership or better quality housing. In the five CMAs studied, an average of 43.8 per cent of the Aboriginal population did not have a high school diploma, compared with 27.5 per cent for non-Aboriginals. Only 6.4 per cent of the Aboriginal population has a university degree, compared with 18.4 per cent for non-Aboriginals. If the positive trend in school attendance experienced from 1981 to 2001 continues, it is likely that urban Aboriginals in the region will find greater employment opportunities and improved earnings.

Unemployment

Despite a 20-year positive trend, the Aboriginal population has a higher unemployment rate than the non-Aboriginal population in 18 of the 19 communities studied, 14.7 per cent and 5.1 per cent, respectively. All but three of the centres studied have Aboriginal unemployment rates above 10 per cent, with a high of more than 20 per cent in two locations.

Household Income

Differences in income between Aboriginal[4] and non-Aboriginal households is evident in each of the 19 centres studied. This disparity in incomes explains why more Aboriginal households are in core housing need[5] than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. As housing costs are the same for all, Aboriginal households must devote a greater percentage of their income to shelter.

Homelessness

While data on homelessness[6] were available in only six of the 19 centres studied, Aboriginal people represent 26.5 per cent of the homeless population, despite making up only 4.8 per cent of the entire population.

Household Type

Lone parent[7] and multifamily households were studied and approximately 30 per cent of Aboriginal households are headed by a lone parent compared with 13.4 per cent for non-Aboriginal households. More than 50 per cent of urban Aboriginal children in the Prairie and Territories Region (PTR) lived in single-parent households, versus 17 to 19 per cent for non-Aboriginal.

Multifamily households frequently experience overcrowding and are in core housing need as a result with Aboriginal households consisting of 2.9 occupants and 2.6 bedrooms, compared with 2.5 and 2.8, respectively, for non-Aboriginals.

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[1] A Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) is an area consisting of one or more adjacent municipalities situated around a major urban core with a population of at least 100,000. A Census Agglomeration (CA) must have an urban core of at least 10,000.

[4] An Aboriginal household is defined as one of the following: a non-family household in which at least 50 per cent of the household members self-identified as Aboriginal; or a family household that meets at least one of two criteria: at least one spouse, common-law partner, or lone parent self-identified as an Aboriginal; or at least 50 per cent of the household members self-identified as Aboriginal.

[5] A household in core housing need is defined by CMHC as a household that does not live in and could not access acceptable housing. Acceptable housing refers to housing that is affordable, in adequate condition, and of suitable size. If any of these conditions are not met the household is deemed to be in core housing need.

"Affordable" refers to dwellings that cost less than 30 per cent of before-tax household income. "Adequate" refers to dwellings that do not require any major repairs. "Suitable" refers to dwellings that are not crowded, according to the National Occupancy Standard requirements (CMHC 1991).

[6] Homelessness can refer to persons who are using temporary shelters, living on the street or living with family or friends on a temporary basis ("couch surfing").

[7] Statistics Canada defines a lone parent household as a lone parent living with one or more children and a multi-family household as two or more families occupying the same dwelling.

Homeownership

The urban Aboriginal homeownership rate in the PTR is 40.7 per cent, compared with 70.1 per cent for non-Aboriginals (see Figure 1). This 30 per cent gap is twice the national rate for the two populations (49.8 vs. 67.4 per cent).

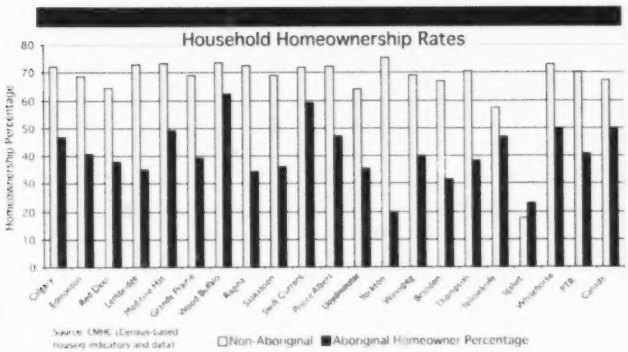

Figure 1 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Household Homeownership Rates

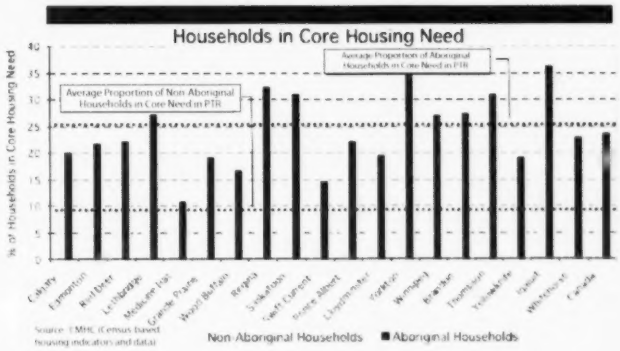
Households in Core Housing Need
Average Proportion of Aboriginal Households in Core Need in PTR
Average Proportion of Non Aboriginal Households in Core Need in PTR
Non-Aboriginal Households
Aboriginal Households

Figure 2 Households in Core Housing Need in CMAs and CAs 2001

Core Housing Need

In all 19 centres studied core housing need for Aboriginal households is much greater than that of non-Aboriginal households and higher in CMAs than CAs. Across the PTR the percentage of Aboriginal households in core housing need is about 25 per cent, while non-Aboriginal household rate is 9.9 per cent. Despite a major decline in the incidence of Aboriginal core housing need between 1996 and 2001, there is still a significant gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal households (see Figures 2 and 3).

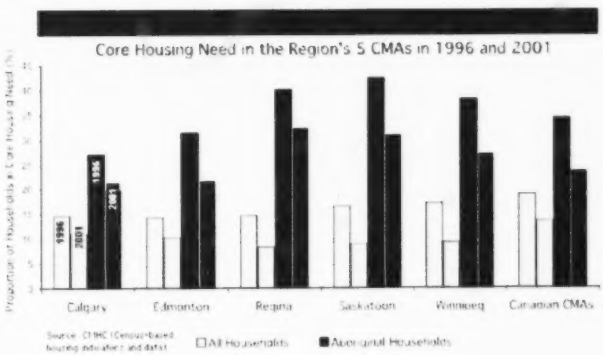

Figure 3 Comparison of Core Housing Need in CMAs 1996 and 2001

CONCLUSIONS

The urban Aboriginal population of the PTR, 6 per cent of the total population, is almost three times the Canadian urban average, and is likely to increase in the coming years.

Among the findings of this study is that the urban Aboriginal population in the PTR:

- has a younger age profile than the non-Aboriginal population. The proportion of Aboriginal persons under 20 is almost twice that of the non-Aboriginal population—over 44 per cent compared to about 26 per cent
- is also almost twice as mobile as their non-Aboriginal counterparts
- has lower educational attainments, for example, 44 per cent of urban Aboriginal individuals in the larger centers did not have a high school certification, compared to 28 per cent of non-Aboriginal population
- has higher unemployment than the non-Aboriginal population —almost 15 per cent compared to 5 per cent unemployment rate—and, accordingly, approximately $15,000 to $20,000 less in household income on average
- were over-represented in the homeless population—26 per cent of homeless in cities where they represented less than 5 per cent of the total population (in the few centers for which data were available)
- were much more likely to be lone-parent—30 per cent compared to 13 per cent for non-Aboriginal and more than twice as likely to be multi-family (4 per cent vs. 2.2 per cent)

Despite a 20-year generally positive trend, and a notable improvement in the circumstances of Aboriginals from 1996 to 2001, they still face more serious housing challenges than non-Aboriginal households.

All the above-noted factors led to a lower level of homeownership, 41 and 70 per cent for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, respectively, and more than two-times the incidence of core housing need, 25 per cent compared with 9.9 per cent.

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Housing Research at CMHC

Under Part IX of the *National Housing Act*, the Government of Canada provides funds to CMHC to conduct research into the social, economic and technical aspects of housing and related fields, and to undertake the publishing and distribution of the results of this research.

This fact sheet is one of a series intended to inform you of the nature and scope of CMHC's research.

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